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ABSTRACT

Given the currently limited numbers of minority students seeking graduate degrees, the competition among universities to attract them has increased. The role that faculty should play in recruiting and retaining minority graduate students is discussed, in particular the type and quality of the relationship between minority graduate students, especially those with teaching and research assistantships, and faculty. The responsibilities of graduate deans and their staffs in encouraging minority students is also briefly discussed. Three tables provide data on degrees received by blacks in selected areas, 1983-86; percentage distribution of faculty at four-year institutions by racial background, sex and ethnic group, 1984; and percent of research and teaching assistantships awarded to doctoral students in selected fields by racial/ethnic group, 1985. (KM)

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ATTRACTING MINORITY GRADUATE STUDENTS AND FACULTY IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCREASING COMPETITION

Prepared for CGS Idea Exchange Meeting
Skybird Meeting Center, Chicago--April 5, 1988

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Attracting Minority Graduate Students and Faculty in an Atmosphere of Increasing Competition

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Trevor L. Chandler, Dean in Residence, CGS

There is now abundant statistical evidence to document that while the numbers of Hispanics who enroll in our graduate programs have increased slightly, the numbers of American Indians have remained steadily low and the decline for Blacks has been precipitous. Similar patterns are evident in the numbers of minority faculty who are employed at the nation's major institutions of higher education. All this is taking place in the face of reportedly increased efforts by universities to recruit minority graduate students and faculty to their campuses, as well as in a rapidly changing demographic atmosphere which demands a greater measure of success in the very areas where the failures of the universities are so persistent.

In this atmosphere of a limited supply of minority students and faculty, the competition among universities to attract them has increased. What has not seemed to keep pace with those efforts is the equally important and absolutely essential need to implement methods to ensure that these minority graduate students and faculty are given every opportunity to succeed once they are on the campus. It is no longer sufficient to rely on the traditional methods of recruitment and retention practiced in a time of plenty. Today there are fewer minority students opting to pursue graduate careers, and fewer faculty in an available pool which is not diverse enough. Table 1 shows the lopsided nature of the pool for Blacks receiving Ph.D.s from 1983–1986. Similar patterns emerge for Hispanics and American Indians.

While some universities may have given up the battle, others are developing new methods to face the challenge presented by these conditions of scarcity. The key element in their approaches is the recognition that recruitment and retention of minorities are two sides of the same coin and that the two functions cannot be carried out independently of each other. Since faculty actually complete the process of recruitment by judging the student's ability to successfully complete the program of study at the university and finally recommend that the student be admitted, it is important that they be involved in the recruitment process as early as possible.

TABLE 1
Total Ph.D.s Received By Blacks In Selected Areas 1983–1986

Year	All Fields	Education	Physical Sciences	Life Sciences
1983	1000	516	32	74
1984	1049	509	44	97
1985	1040	503	41	98
1986	946	462	33	85
Total	4035	1990	150	354

Source: Summary Report: Doctorate Recipients From U.S. Universities, National Research Council.

At most institutions faculty have always played and continue to play a vital role in the recruitment of students. But that role had not involved the specific search for minorities. Faculty recruited students by directly contacting their colleagues at other institutions and requesting their "best" students, or by seeking out students who were encouraged by their mentors to deliver papers at national conventions, or by accepting the best of those students who had applied to their department. In the majority of instances this process yielded students who were white and male. This additional recruitment of minority students is not a traditional function of the faculty and may require extraordinary effort on the part of the university's administration and faculty body to justify and insure their cooperation in these matters. In essence it requires the commitment of the entire university including Regents, Chancellors, Presidents, Provosts, and Deans. At public institutions controlled by the state, the implementation of such changes in faculty roles may require the cooperation of the legislature.

A student's decision to attend a given institution may depend on any combination of a variety of issues, but generally students report that their perceptions in three major areas are critical. These are (1) the institution's reputation; (2) a sense that he/she can attain some measure of success at that institution; and (3) the compatibility of the internal and external environments at the institution with his/her needs. How an institution communicates in these three areas, therefore, may well determine the level of success it will have in attracting minority applicants to its campuses. Minority students are no less interested than others in attaining degrees at the nation's leading institutions, but they are interested additionally in the way in which those institutions have addressed or are addressing the issue of the minority presence on the campus. This too is part of the institution's reputation, and all too often the best intentioned institutions fail to convey their message properly in this area.

What this suggests is that from our very first contact with students we have an obligation to be aware of these areas of minority student concern. Reviewing and revising the information which we send out to all students to include both the university's and the department's knowledge of and attitudes toward these concerns, therefore, can be a step in the right direction in developing a language of encouragement. But while these changes may be necessary, they are not sufficient to the task of making the university attractive.

What happens after the students get to the campus is of even greater importance, and requires additional effort on the part of the faculty who are responsible for their presence.

At four-year institutions in the United States an analysis of the racial background of the faculty indicates that it is overwhelmingly white and male. Only 1.5% of the male faculty is Black and 1.0% Hispanic (Table 2). Not surprisingly, therefore, white male faculty must bear the brunt of the thrust to retain minority students in their programs. This calls for more than assurances that financial assistance will be available to the student. What must be accomplished in these academic settings is the effective crossing of racial barriers to develop the same kinds of bonds which are possible between non-minority students and faculty.

TABLE 2
Percentage Distribution of Faculty At Four-year Institutions By Racial Background, Sex And Ethnic Group—1984

Racial Background	Sex	
	Male	Female
White	93.6	93.2
Black	1.5	3.2
Hispanic	1.0	0.9
American Indian	0.0	0.0
Asian American	3.3	1.8
Other	0.7	0.8

Source: Fact Book on Higher Education. 1986–87. ACE/Macmillan.

Because of the nature and requirements of graduate training, a student's success is greatly affected by the type and quality of the relationship which he or she develops both with the faculty and with other students in the department. Such relationships are generally shaped through the close working association which comes from being a research or teaching assistant. A special CGS analysis of 1985 National Research Council data found that 19% of Hispanic, 18% of American Indian, and 13% of Black doctoral students reported having received teaching and research assistantships during their graduate career. Only one in 20 Black graduate students reported receiving R.A.s. These differences are especially evident for awards of research assistantships in the physical sciences where 42% of all students were supported by R.A.s, but only 17% of Blacks and 26% of Hispanics received such awards (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Percent of Research and Teaching Assistantships Awarded To Doctoral Students in Selected Fields by Racial/Ethnic Group—1985

Field	Total	AI	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
All Doctorates							
Teaching	14	9	11	8	12	15	8
Research	16	9	25	5	7	16	12
Physical Sciences							
Teaching	22	50	18	17	38	22	16
Research	42	25	42	17	26	43	32
Engineering							
Teaching	7	0	7	5	6	7	5
Research	42	0	47	21	31	43	33

Source: National Research Council, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1985.

Teaching and research assistantships facilitate close and prolonged interaction with students and faculty as well as help students to learn departmental regulations and to get a sense of themselves in the discipline. Meetings with other T.A.s who teach the same class to discuss problems and plan teaching approaches, as well as being evaluated and guided by the faculty member for whom one works, are important mechanisms for developing both self assurance and skill as a graduate student. Receiving the support and constructive criticism of one's fellow R.A.s as the group works through several research problems sharpens academic skill and improves scholarship. By these means one becomes a full citizen of the department and understands its responsibilities while enjoying its privileges. This prolonged contact also provides faculty members the means to make more informed decisions about the minority student's scholarship and promise especially as they make recommendations to future employers.

There are several other roles for which the faculty must take responsibility in the effort to attract and retain minority graduate students. Many of these have been discussed and will no doubt continue to be discussed over the years. But what has become increasingly evident is that programs designed to attract and retain minority graduate students, especially at predominantly white institutions, must have the strong and continuing participation and support of the institution's administration and faculty.

The graduate dean and his/her staff also have an important responsibility if they hope to enhance the opportunities for growth and success among the minority participants in their graduate programs. The staff must be prepared to assist in the design, maintenance, and continuous upgrading and evaluation of efforts to identify and recruit promising minority graduate students. Working with undergraduate students to encourage and interest them in graduate education is an important part of this responsibility. Getting young undergraduates to think of their B.A. degree as the first rather than the last degree that they will pursue is critical. In fact, this task should receive the highest possible priority given the state of affairs regarding minority participation in graduate education as we move into the twenty-first century. In this endeavor the graduate dean and other administrators also have an obligation to keep the university community constantly aware of the importance of these efforts both to the institution and to the nation as a whole.

As we try to increase the number of minority graduate students who attend our institutions, we must also make every effort to improve the departmental environments which will support a higher retention and graduation rate among these students. Attempting to do the former without also instituting the latter may well be an exercise in futility. ●